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ABSTRACT

Issues presented at a symposium on ethnic minority perspectives and evaluation of early childhood education are presented. Two presentations are summarized. The first, "Evaluation Research and the Education of Oppressed Minority Group Members," by Edward J. Barnes, emphasizes that the evaluation of education programs must include a look at the person in a social as well as academic context. It is stated that the exclusion of ethnic minority values from the academic scene is the cause for the school system's failure to educate ethnic minority children. The second paper, "The Implications of Cognitive Styles and Cultural Democracy for Evaluation Research," by Manuel Ramirez, states that cultures and values of minority groups in the United States, especially those of Black and Indians, have been viewed as pathological and inferior. It is also stated that the result of ignoring these cultures is the alienation of minority group children from the schools. (CK)

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Ethnic Minority Perspectives on the Evaluation
of Early Childhood Education Programs

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A. Objectives of the Symposium

The purpose of the symposium is to present ethnic minority perspectives and recommendations on the evaluation of early childhood education. The ethnic minorities are demanding that their "experience," values, and goals be represented in the social institutions that influence the lives of their children. They contend that the schools should support cultural pluralism in American society rather than attempting to indoctrinate all pupils with the values of the dominant Anglo middle-class culture.

Ethnic minority spokesmen are insisting on a re-examination of the value assumptions that underlie educational practice and evaluation. To obtain favorable scores on many existing instruments, ethnic minority pupils must evidence Anglo middle-class values and behaviors at the expense of denying the values of their own ethnic group. They want instruments that reflect the ethnic values.

Another suggestion is that measurement constructs should be more consistent with the social reality experienced by ethnic minority pupils. For example, the internal locus of control orientation (i.e., personal acceptance of responsibility for success and failure experiences) is assumed to reflect the belief that a person possesses power over the consequences of his behavior. However, for a minority youngster growing up in the poverty of the ghetto, an internal control orientation may be an inaccurate, maladaptive, and excessively intrapunitive distortion and denial of the true conditions of his environment. Indeed, an external control orientation attributing the responsibility for success and failure to other people and forces may be a much more accurate perception of the environmental forces that really do act to shape and control the outcomes of his behavior.

Many of the issues to be discussed have been vigorously debated and clarified in Project Follow Through evaluation policy and planning sessions attended by Drs. Barnes, Ramirez, and Rhine. For the past three years, Rhine was a member of the Stanford Research Institute staff that has planned and implemented the national evaluation of the Follow Through. Barnes and Ramirez have been frequent consultants to the project. Follow Through is a comprehensive experimental education program to maintain and enhance the benefits of Head Start for disadvantaged children in grades K, 1, 2, and 3. Approximately two-thirds of the Follow Through population of 70,000 pupils are from ethnic minority groups.

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B. Summary of Each Presentation

Drs. Barnes and Ramirez have served as ethnic minority consultants for Head Start and Follow Through. In addition, each is chairman of a Social Science Research Council subcommittee on innovative approaches to measurement for ethnic minority children.

Edward J. Barnes, Ph.D., Associate Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and Director of the University Community Educational Program, University of Pittsburgh.

Evaluation Research and the Education of Oppressed Minority Group Members

The evaluation of education programs, especially childhood education, cannot be limited to measures of classroom achievement. The focus must be enlarged to include the whole person-in-a-social-context whose academic and personal growth is affected by the quality of his environment. A child's self-concept is a significant aspect of his growth and cannot be separated from his performance in the classroom.

Evaluation research that seeks to assist in understanding and resolving social problems must become more explicit about the underlying assumptions, values, and goals of those who construct the instruments. There are multiple subcultural groups varying in world view, styles, modes, values, etc. Education and evaluation research must be appropriate for each respective group.

The exclusion of ethnic minority values from the society and from the schools is a primary reason for the failure of the schools to educate ethnic minority children. Evaluation research can assist the schools in serving all peoples of the society instead of representing and guarding the "White Anglo-Saxon ideal."

Manuel Ramirez, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Mexican-American Studies and Psychology and Director, Bicultural Bilingual Project, University of California, Riverside.

The Implications of Cognitive Styles and Cultural Democracy for Evaluation Research

Cultures and values of minority groups in the United States, especially those of Blacks, Indians, and the peoples of La Raza, have been viewed as pathological and inferior. Consequently, the education evaluation models applied to ethnic minority children have been based on inappropriate assumptions that are damaging. The result of ignoring culturally unique learning and incentive motivational styles is the alienation of minority group children from the schools.

The new philosophy of cultural democracy insists that institutions must change to be consonant with the learning and incentive-motivational styles of ethnic minority children. In a compatible learning environment people will not be required to reject their identity to be considered successful and well adjusted.

Witkin's concept of field dependence-independence seems promising for implementing cultural democracy in evaluation research. Our preliminary research indicates that most Chicano children, especially those from traditional environments, are field dependent when compared to Anglo children of the same age, sex, and socio-economic class. The results of current research on acculturation and cognitive styles in three Chicano communities in California should help to develop more effective instructional programs for both field dependent and field independent children.

C. Scientific or Educational Importance of the Symposium

National early childhood education intervention programs have become vehicles for the expression of ethnic minority values and demands for social justice. The controversy over the evaluation of programs such as Head Start and Follow Through reflects the deeper struggle among stakeholder groups for control of funding and decision-making power on program operations.

This symposium is presented in the hope that articulation and discussion of ethnic minority concerns and recommendations may assist in moving beyond confrontation to more productive discussion and resolution of these heated and divisive issues in American education.